

SCHUMANN • BRAHMS

Piano Quintets

Kodály Quartet
Jenő Jandó, Piano



Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856)

Piano Quintet in E Flat Major, Op. 44

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34

Compositions for piano quintet have their origin in works designed for keyboard and string quartet in the eighteenth century, some of them in the form of chamber concertos. In the nineteenth century the first notable example of the genre came from a musician much admired by Beethoven, Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, a nephew of Frederick the Great, whose C minor Piano Quintet was well known to Schumann. The century brought a small but distinguished repertoire in the form, to which Brahms, Dvorák and César Franck made notable contributions.

Schumann, born in Zwickau in 1810, the son of a publisher and writer, had early, if undisciplined, interests in a career as a musician, centring at first on performance at the keyboard. His teacher Friedrich Wieck, his future reluctant father-in-law, saw a possible place for him as a concert pianist, once his widowed mother had been persuaded to allow him to leave university and concentrate on music. These hopes were defeated by a weakness in Schumann's fingers, possibly the result of mercury treatment for a venereal infection contracted in the early 1830s. Marriage in 1840 to Clara Wieck, after protracted litigation with her father, led Schumann to turn from composition for the piano to attempts at larger musical forms, encouraged by his young wife. He had won at early reputation for himself as a writer on musical subjects whose sometimes controversial critical opinions were widely read, if not always accepted. His first official appointment as a performing musician, however, came only in 1850, when he became municipal music director in Düsseldorf,

a position in which he achieved little practical success before his mental break-down in 1854 and death two years later.

Schumann's earlier chamber music had been in the form of attempts at string quartets, but it was only after his marriage that he settled down in 1842 to work on the rapid composition of a group of three string quartets, their completion announced to his wife as the birth of three children, just born, and already completed and beautiful. In August Schumann took a brief holiday with his wife in Bohemia, a change that relieved to some extent the depression he had suffered after a period of elation as he wrote the quartets. On their return to Leipzig Clara Schumann found herself pregnant again, a year after the birth of her first child, and Schumann himself set to work on a new composition for her, the Piano Quintet, a work that was to set a model for later composers. It was followed at once by a Piano Quartet.

The Piano Quintet enjoyed an immediate success. Clara Schumann first played it in Leipzig in 1843 and it formed part of the repertoire of her Russian tour of 1844, during which her husband found himself in an uncomfortably depressing position as mere consort to a musician of recognised distinction. Four years later the Quintet failed to please Liszt, who arrived at a musical evening at the Schumanns' two hours late, and condemned the work as too Leipzig-like, a criticism that Schumann took as an attack on his friend Mendelssohn, who had died the year before. Liszt's later disparagement of Mendelssohn in comparison with Meyerbeer led to an open dispute at the dinner-table, and Schumann's withdrawal from the room in disgust. In spite of her husband's later bitter criticism of her performance, as his final illness drew on, suggesting that the Quintet could only be understood by a man, the work remained a popular part of Clara Schumann's repertoire throughout her life.

Schumann sketched the Piano Quintet in the remarkably short time of five days and completed the score in the following two weeks. The first subject is declaimed by the whole ensemble, and the cello, followed by the viola,

introduces the romantic second subject. The piano carries the burden of the central development, based on the first subject, which returns to open the recapitulation. The second movement is a sinister C minor March. The sombre atmosphere is relieved by a major second subject. The central F minor episode of this sonata-rondo movement is marked *agitato*, with exciting activity in the piano part, which settles into a gentler accompaniment as the viola recalls the march theme. A rapid ascending scale from the piano opens and provides the chief material of the Scherzo. The first of the two contrasting Trios has reminiscences of the first subject of the first movement and the second is characterised by its agile brilliance, before the final return of the Scherzo itself. The last movement opens in C minor with a firmly stated theme played by the piano, continuing with an adventurous exploration of other keys, as the principal theme re-appears. The first subject of the first movement returns, in augmentation, as a countersubject to the theme, as the movement proceeds to its emphatic conclusion.

In 1853 Johannes Brahms, then at the start of his professional career, had been introduced to Schumann and his wife, through the agency of the young violinist Joseph Joachim. He made a deep impression and Schumann wrote an article for the journal he had once edited, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, in fulsome praise. Brahms, the son of relatively humble parents in Hamburg, valued highly Schumann's encouragement and an enthusiasm that must have been embarrassing in its suggestion of what might be to come. During Schumann's final illness, when he was in a private asylum at Eendenich, separated from his wife, Brahms was of considerable practical help to Clara Schumann and her young family, and the relationship continued until her death in 1896, by which time Brahms had been established for some thirty years in Vienna. There his supporters, following Schumann's early prophecy, found in him a successor to Beethoven, whose mantle Wagner had been so eager to appropriate.

Brahms was himself a pianist, although in later years his friends praised his

musicianship more than his technical accuracy. His Piano Quintet in F minor, Opus 34, originated as a string quintet in 1862, scored, like Schubert's great quintet, for two cellos. Joachim suggested that the weight of the composition suggested the advisability of using the piano, and it was then recast as a sonata for two pianos and played in this form by the composer and Carl Tausig in 1864. The work owes its third transformation to the intervention of Clara Schumann.

Brahms completed his Piano Quintet in the autumn of 1864 and published it the following year with a dedication to Princess Anna of Hesse. The first movement opens with the restrained announcement of the first subject by first violin, cello and piano, before an explosion of energy and the statement of the theme in fuller splendour, leading to a second subject largely in the unusual key of C sharp minor. The re-appearance of the first theme marks the beginning of the central development, and, less directly, the recapitulation, with its second subject now in F sharp minor. The slow movement, in A flat major, breathes an air of calm serenity and is followed by a Scherzo that starts with the hushed plucked bottom note of the cello, an accompaniment to the syncopated theme that leads from A flat to C minor, before a cheerful and robust outburst in C major, and the later contrast of a C major Trio. The Finale has a subdued introduction, the ascending octave of the cello answered by the first violin, piano, viola and second violin in turn. The cello is given the opening theme of the Allegro that follows, breaking the suspense of what had gone before, with a second subject appearing in the first violin, marked *un pochettino più animato* and proceeding to a passage that combines great energy with rhythmic and contrapuntal subtlety. The movement, which lacks an orthodox central development, ends in a coda, marked *Presto, non troppo*, that serves to emphasise still more the underlying thematic and harmonic unity of the work.

Jenő Jandó

Jenő Jandó was born at Pécs, in south Hungary, in 1952. He started to learn the piano when he was seven and later studied at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music under Katalin Nemes and Pál Kadosa, becoming assistant to the latter on his graduation in 1974. Jandó has won a number of piano competitions in Hungary and abroad, including first prize in the 1973 Hungarian Piano Concours and a first prize in the chamber music category at the Sydney International Piano Competition in 1977. In addition to his many appearances in Hungary, he has played widely abroad in Eastern and Western Europe, in Canada and in Japan. He is currently engaged in a project to record all Mozart's piano concertos for Naxos. Other recordings for the Naxos label include the concertos of Grieg and Schumann as well as Rachmaninov's second Concerto and Paganini Rhapsody and Beethoven's complete piano sonatas.

Kodály Quartet

The members of the Kodály Quartet were trained at the Budapest Ferenc Liszt Academy, and three of them, the second violin Tamás Szabo, viola-player Gábor Fias and cellist János Devich, were formerly in the Sebestyén Quartet, which was awarded the jury's special diploma at the 1966 Geneva International Quartet Competition and won first prize at the 1968 Leo Weiner Quartet Competition in Budapest. Since 1970, with the violinist Attila Falvay, the quartet has been known as the Kodály Quartet, a title adopted with the approval of the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education. The Kodály Quartet has given concerts throughout Europe, in the Soviet Union and in Japan, in addition to regular appearances in Hungary both in the concert hall and on television.

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STEREO

SCHUMANN • BRAHMS

Piano Quintets

Kodály Quartet

Jenő Jandó, Piano

DDD

Playing
Time :
66'50"

NAXOS

SCHUMANN • BRAHMS: Piano Quintets

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SCHUMANN: Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano in E Flat Major, Op. 44

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|---|--|--------|
| 1 | Allegro brillante | (9:07) |
| 2 | In modo d'una marcia. Un poco largamente | (8:07) |
| 3 | Scherzo: Molto vivace - Trio I - Trio II - L'istesso tempo | (4:45) |
| 4 | Allegro, ma non troppo | (7:06) |

BRAHMS: Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano in F Minor, Op. 34

- | | | |
|---|--|---------|
| 5 | Allegro non troppo | (11:04) |
| 6 | Andante, un poco adagio | (8:22) |
| 7 | Scherzo: Allegro - Trio | (7:19) |
| 8 | Finale: Poco sostenuto - Allegro non troppo - Presto, non troppo | (10:35) |

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